

Siddhartha

Knowledge can be expressed, but not wisdom. One can discover it, one can live it, one can be borne along by it, one can do miracles with it, but one cannot express it and teach it.

A truth can be expressed and cloaked in words only if it is one-sided. Everything that can be thought in thoughts and expressed in words is one-sided, only a half. All such thoughts lack wholeness, fullness, unity. When the venerable Gotama [Buddha] taught and spoke of the world, he had to divide it into samsara and nirvana, deception and truth, suffering and liberation. There is no other possibility, no other way for those who would teach. But the world itself, existence around us and within us, is never one-sided. Never is a person or an act wholly samsara or wholly nirvana; never is a person entirely holy or sinful.

The world, my friend Govinda, is not imperfect or confined at a point somewhere along a gradual pathway toward perfection. No, it is perfect at every moment.

I see whatever is, as good. I see that life and death, sin and holiness, intelligence and foolishness must be as they are. It all only requires my consent, my willingness, my loving acceptance, and it will be good for me, can never harm me. I have experienced in my own mind and body that I was very much in need; I needed sensual pleasure, striving for possessions, vanity, and extreme debasement and despair in order to learn to give up resisting, in order to learn to love the world, in order to cease comparing it to some imagined world that I wished for, some form of perfection I had thought up, and let it be as it is and love it and be glad to be part of it.

Love, for me, Govinda, is clearly the main thing. Let seeing through the world, explaining it, looking down on it, be the business of great thinkers. The only thing of importance to me is being able to love the world, without looking down on it, without hating it and myself — being able to regard it and myself and all beings with love, admiration, and reverence."

- Excerpts from Siddhartha, by Hermann Hesse, first published in 1922, translated by Sherab Chodzin Kohn. ©2000 by Shambhala Publications. reprinted in The Sun, Dec. 2011